

William F. Buckley Jr.

Amnesty International



A year or so back I joined the Board of Directors of Amnesty International, on the understanding that I would remain free to exercise my own judgment concerning any of the organization's particular activities. All of this sounds defensive, and shouldn't because by and large Amnesty is concerned with the kind of thing decent people ought to be concerned about, mainly the imperative to help others who are in trouble. In Amnesty's case, political trouble.

What are the rights of a nation to protect itself against certain kinds of political dissent? Ideally, the dissenter should be protected, even as he is in the United States. However, even in the United States, a qualification is generally recognized, the qualification of clear and present danger. That (in my judgment) is as it should be.

At the other end is the Soviet Union. There, political freedom exists only in the Newspeak in which the Soviet Union regularly trades. It did not surprise anybody back in the late 40's. Stalin's Russia should have co-sponsored the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, which is as if Ralph Ginzburg had co-sponsored the Legion of Decency. One cannot lecture Russia on what she should do. One can only put pressure on Russia to do what she

should do, and that — to its eternal credit — Amnesty is trying to do.

In Russia a poor Ukrainian lawyer, a citizen of Czechoslovakia, has been imprisoned since 1947. His crime? None—because he has yet to be tried. He was caught up during one of those stalinist seizures, for having defended someone somebody didn't like for whatever reason. He was found guiltless of any known crime by a Polish court, which however then surrendered him to the Soviet Union, which sent him off to a concentration camp where he now—miraculously—still lives. His name is Volodymyr Horbovy. Remember him in your prayers. If he is freed, it will be by the will of God. Still, it is Amnesty which has got word through to Horbovy that his name is not dead among those few who care.

The second object of Amnesty's current attention poses more difficult, and more interesting, problems. More interesting because there is a ground of communication between Amnesty, and the government of Portugal, which continues to imprison a 70-year-old gentleman named Telo de Mascarenhas.

The dissent of Mr. Mascarenhas is rather more complicated than that of the Czech. Mr. M. was a Goan — a lawyer, writer, and agitator. Goa is perhaps forgotten as the tiny Portuguese enclave in western India which was gobbled up by Nehru between speeches against aggression. Mr. M. was delighted, inasmuch as for years he had been delcaiming against Portuguese colonialism etc etc.

But all of that happened in 1961. And the technical case against Mr. M. was always very veary bad. It seems to me that nothing is clearer than that Goa's attachment to Portugal was in clear and present danger. Even so, the actual behavior of the Portugese appears to be utterly reprehensible. To begin with, the Portuguese offered amnesty to anyone who returned to Goa. Mascarenhas took advantage of the offer — but even so, the Portuguese whisked him off to Libson and in due course sentenced him to jail for 24 years. According to Amnesty, he was not convicted of any crimes of

violence, merely of having advocated the detachment of Goa from Portugal.

At this point, one regrets the ideologization of Amnesty's brief, which states, "All efforts must be made to secure the release of this well known writer, profound political thinker and a great patriot." Now I do not know whether M. is a profound political thinker, and what is more, I do not care. I will not believe that he is a great patriot until I am shown the evidence that Goa wanted to be incorporated by India, which evidence I have never seen, even as I have never seen evidence that Gibraltar desires to be incorporated into Spain.

I believe in punishment for political crimes, under certain circumstances. But I believe (who doesn't) in mercy. And that ought to be the principal point. Portugal's keeping of this 70-year-old physical wreck in jail, ten years after the fate of Goa was irrevocably settled, is simply uncouth. Monstrous, even. And I join Amnesty in respectfully urging the Portuguese government — respectfully because I for one profoundly believe that whatever the Portuguese internal political arrangement, men like Salazar and Caetano are essentially decent men—to admit the legal error, if they are so minded; but if not, to grant clemency — quickly, and quietly.

Quips and Quotes

Children are natural mimics: they act like their parents in spite of efforts to teach them good manners. — Mason City (Ia.) Globe-Gazette.

One small jack can lift a car, but it takes a lot of jack to keep it up. —Tulsa World.

Perhaps the cruelest thing a parent can do nowadays is to push a bright child through school too fast. What if he arrives at college too young to grow a beard? —Wichita Eagle.

4

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